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Statement submitted by Hydroaid, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

Building on networks: ideas for addressing demographic and environmental stress by supporting inclusive sustainable development

Demographic growth and lack of planning guidelines are two of the major forces leading developing countries to critical conditions in terms of environmental degradation and life quality, unsustainable scenarios for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and instability. At Hydroaid we believe in an integrated approach to development revolving around water as a key resource and on training as a tool for promoting sustainable resources management.

The increasingly worrisome impacts of global climate and environmental change, which are adding considerable stress to countries whose resources are already scarce, brought us in the years to develop a strong sensitivity for contexts characterized by high pressures on their local resources. With this idea, we welcomed the theme of Earth Day 2014 "Green Cities" that focused the global attention to urbanization trends in relation to sustainable growth and population issues.

At the same time we have long acknowledged the role of private investments, whose contribution is rapidly growing and has become, in some contexts, the main driver of the economy. We believe that the importance of private subjects, contributing to the GDP growth in a directly proportional way, cannot be ignored by international cooperation and that a successful vision for the post-2015 development agenda must incorporate strategies for synergy between public and private entities.

Increased concerns for rapidly and uncontrollably growing urban agglomerations in developing contexts accompanied us in our 13 years of activity. That's also the case of Arba Minch (Ethiopia), target city of our recent Project WATSAM, a European-funded initiative to support the local water and sanitation sector. The population of Arba Minch has more than doubled in the past 20 years and today counts almost 100,000 inhabitants. The same trend has been detected all across the country, the second most populous and the one with the highest demographic growth in Africa. Arba Minch, like several similar areas, is likely to face strong environmental stress and a degradation of living conditions if a good governance and a preventive planning approach are not set in motion since now.

Since its beginning in 2012, WATSAM strived to establish a hotbed for cooperation encouraging relations among local stakeholders: institutions and utilities have all been engaged to support a gradual process of inclusion of public and private entities sharing the same rules and goals. This approach had proved its validity in other cooperation projects carried out by Hydroaid, such as in the case of Brazil, with whom we established a cooperation program 10 years ago and in which a strong public control system is associated with the growing role of the private sector.

With this in mind we appreciate the opportunity to take part in the international conference organized by Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) and the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) titled "Promoting stability and development in Africa: fostering cooperation between public and private sectors"

(Torino, Italy, 1-2 December 2014). This event saw a positive dialogue of entities whose nature varied from public institutions to private companies and NGOs, but who all agreed on the need for promoting inclusive and bottom-up paths to development in order to ensure a larger involvement of stakeholders and combining the necessary public investments with the potential of the private sector. A powerful combination that, if appropriately envisioned, could match GDP growth to more equitable wealth distribution.

This is an important reversal of vision over sustainable development: it is based on a realistic consideration of all forces in play and promotes the idea that it's not the competition, but the synergy of the subjects to ensure high levels of efficiency, quality and sustainability of the services delivered — especially water and energy supply, and waste management. This is how Hydroaid conceives its role in "fostering cooperation between the public and private sectors" while knowing that when we talk about basic services we need to consider not only water but the security nexus of Climate Change, Water, Food, and Energy, that implies an integrated vision of development, as advocated by the 2014 World Water Development Report.

According to our experience, in addition to good environmental policies, it is necessary to work also on a system for dissemination of skills and know-hows, to be adequately interpreted and systematized within national and local frameworks. Sound transfer of knowledge and the ability of spreading it into own systems is an essential requirement for sustaining growth trends in the long term and it can be fostered even further, towards the Sustainable Development Goals of the post-2015 agenda, by a model of services management where private actors have an active role and find in cooperative networks a pool for constant improvement.